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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 002543

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SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT LEE TENG-HUI ON UN REFERENDUM, DOMESTIC POLITICS, AND INTERNATIONAL AND CROSS-STRAIT ISSUES

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with the Director on November 27, former President Lee Teng-hui criticized the DPP for playing an "election game" with its UN referendum, which he characterized as "empty and meaningless." Lee dismissed the "1992 consensus" and "one China, separate interpretations" as inventions of former Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chairman Su Chi. Referring to recent defections by several Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) legislators to the DPP, Lee said this would allow room in the party for new people who are more interested in democracy than the DPP's pursuit of position and money. While not specifically saying he would endorse DPP presidential candidate Frank Hsieh, Lee made no effort to dispel media rumors that he will do so at the appropriate time. End Summary.

Presidential Election

¶12. (C) The Director called on former President Lee Teng-hui on November 27 to discuss the political situation in the run-up to the legislative and presidential elections. Noting that the Taiwan media keeps asking him who his favorite is in Taiwan's upcoming presidential election, the Director explained to Lee that he always stresses our neutrality in response to such questions. In response, Lee told the Director he is unable to say who he will support in the election, and therefore always tells the media that he doesn't know. (Note: TECRO Council Member Corey Chen, a close advisor to DPP candidate Frank Hsieh, told AIT recently that Lee has offered to endorse Hsieh, who has asked Lee to hold off until shortly before the election for maximum effect. End Note.)

UN Referendum

¶13. (C) According to Lee, there is no reason to hold a referendum on joining the UN since it is already very clear that most people in Taiwan would like to join the UN. Lee questioned the rationale for the DPP's move, observing that the DPP has no "second step" following the referendum that would help Taiwan make progress toward joining the UN. In addition, linking the referendum to the election turns the UN

issue into an "election game" rather than a question for serious consideration. The DPP's referenda are intended to increase votes in the legislative and presidential elections, Lee maintained, adding that he opposed such referenda as "empty and meaningless."

¶4. (C) Lee noted he had not studied the question of whether the one-stage or two-stage voting procedure would be better for the elections and referenda. The Central Election Commission should consult with local authorities to decide on the best method, he suggested, adding that President Chen should not be talking about the issue. Lee also criticized Chen and Vice President Lu for criticizing ordinary citizens who were protesting about their economic difficulties. Chen, who says too much, is a little "crazy," Lee observed.

U.S.-Taiwan Relations

¶5. (C) The Director assured Lee that, similar to the situation when Lee was president, the U.S. maintains good communication channels with President Chen and his senior officials. The problem is not with our dialogue, the Director stressed, but that our two sides have different views. While the U.S. has a regional and global perspective, Taiwan leaders seem concerned only about elections. Lee suggested this problem is unavoidable and the situation will be difficult to change as there are only 167 (sic, the correct number is 175) days left in Chen's term.

¶6. (C) Noting that he has regular contacts with presidential candidates Frank Hsieh (DPP) and Ma Ying-jeou (KMT), the Director stressed our hope to improve U.S.-Taiwan relations

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after the presidential election. The new Taiwan president will need time, Lee observed, and the U.S. will have a new president in January 2009.

¶7. (C) The Director pointed out that Beijing bears some responsibility for the problems caused by President Chen. Beijing has refused all along to work with Chen and the PRC's military buildup and its international pressure have had negative effects in Taiwan. Lee argued that the PRC is following in the footsteps of the traditional imperial system. While China has not changed, Taiwan has democratized. Democracy is a universal value, Lee continued, and therefore Taiwan cannot accept the "Asian values" advocated by Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan-yew. Taking an apparent dig at Lee Kuan-yew, who first championed this term, Lee Teng-hui also charged the DPP government with practicing "Asian values," ruling in an imperial style and being more corrupt than under the KMT.

Taiwan-Japan Ties

¶8. (C) Noting that Frank Hsieh had studied at Kyoto University, Lee stated that the Japanese like him better than KMT candidate Ma Ying-jeou. According to Lee, Ma cannot really improve his relations with the Japanese with just one or two visits. Rather, what is needed is sustained contact and friendship at senior levels, Lee maintained, citing the relationship between President Bush and former Prime Minister Koizumi.

Cross-Strait Relations

¶9. (C) Former Mainland Affairs Council Chairman Su Chi (KMT) has admitted he invented the terms "1992 consensus" and "one China, separate interpretations," Lee said. Beijing's insistence on "one China" is a reflection of its imperial mentality, he argued, adding that a genuine communist party would reject imperial ideas of the past and act for the interests of the people.

¶10. (C) After Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) Chairman Koo Chen-fu's visit to China in 1998, Lee recalled, PRC Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) Chairman Wang Daohan wanted to visit Taiwan. However, Lee suspected something was wrong when Wang's planned trip was postponed from April to October or November, 1999. After checking in Beijing, Lee discovered that PRC President Jiang Zemin was planning to announce in front of foreign leaders at the October 1 National Day ceremony that Taiwan and China would begin political talks during Wang's visit to Taiwan. Lee said he wanted to put an end to Jiang's plan and this was the background for his statement on the "two-state theory" in an interview with German television that July. SEF and ARATS were authorized to talk only about practical issues, Lee added, not to hold political talks.

¶11. (C) In Lee's view, Beijing has been unsuccessful recently in trying to use Honorary KMT Chairman Lien Chan for its own purposes. According to Lee, Beijing asked Lien to tell Ma Ying-jeou to cancel the party's September 15 rally in support of the KMT's UN referendum. However, Ma did not listen to Lien. Subsequently, Lien wanted to do some touring while on a trip to China but the Chinese hosts did not oblige and Lien had to return to Taiwan early, using the excuse that his father and mother were in poor health. As a consequence of this episode, Beijing no longer regards Lien as very useful, Lee maintained.

Taiwan Solidarity Union

¶12. (C) Lee noted that the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) (Lee is the "spiritual leader" of the party) is undergoing reorganization. Referring to the recent defections of several legislators, he said the "bad people" in the TSU have now left the party, lured away by the DPP. Lee voiced confidence this will create room for new people who are more

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interested in democracy than in the DPP's pursuit of position and money, and added that he had told the media this is a "very good" development. Lee expressed concern that Taiwan has many people who do not understand democracy but rather practice "Asian values" like corruption. Taiwan needs a democratic leader to prevent the enemies of democracy from trying to reverse the democratization process in Taiwan.

Comment

¶13. (C) Lee seemed in good health for a man of his age (almost 85) and was quite sharp as always. Although Lee's deep disdain for President Chen was to be expected, the fact that he is keeping count of the days until Chen leaves office (which is shown nightly on a popular TV talk-show) is remarkable. According to a contact close to Frank Hsieh, Lee's relations with Chen are "extraordinarily bad," while his relations with Hsieh are "extraordinarily good." Lee's belief that the DPP's UN referendum is simply a tool that the party is cynically using to increase voter turnout is widely shared here. Lee's waning political influence may be further reduced if the TSU does as poorly as many expect in the January legislative elections. Nonetheless, no major political figure here wants to offend Lee.

YOUNG